DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 373 EC 202 542

AUTHOR Meeker, Mary
TITLE The Next Challenge in Gifted Education.
PUB DATE Sep 87
NOTE 3p.; Speech given at the Conference of the California Association for the Gifted (February 20, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Communicator; v17 n4 Sep 1987

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Identification; *Educational Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; History; Individualized Instruction; *Intelligence Differences; *Program Evaluation; Scientific Attitudes; Student Educational Objectives; *Teacher Education; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

The history of leadership by California educators in the field of gifted develop the intellectual giftedness. The document argues for the objective evaluation article asserts that gifted education in California is at the end of its adolescence and ready to have a new degree of order introduced through the adoption of scientific processes. The rules suggested for guiding a program scientifically include having: (1) a well delineated program; (2) generalizable implementation procedures; (3) measureable objectives which are to be measured and tracked; (4) means of reporting documented results and enforced recognition of this reporting by all people engaged in the public education of the gifted; and (5) the earliest identification of differentiated intellectual abilities followed up with uniquely matched curriculum to further develop the intellectual giftedness. The document argues for the objective evaluation of the impact of gifted programs on participating students and for the open sharing of outcomes among programs. Also advocated is the assessment of every child upon school entry to identify individual abilities and the training of teachers to understand the nature of differentiated intellectual abilities so that curriculum experiences can be designed according to individual needs. Contributions in the area of differential intelligences are summarized. (VW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mary Meeker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED294373

CAG Communicator

Volume XVII; Number 4 September, 1987

The Next Challenge in Gifted Education

February 20, 1987 Speech given at **California Association for Gifted** upon being honored as a pioneer in gifted education, Mary Meeker

We in California have the knowledge, we have the experience, we have in our state among the best of the countries' experts. and collectively, we have over 20 years of statistical data, So who is better qualified to take the next challenge facing educators of the gifted? The challenge I offer is this: to develop a science of gifted education. And this is what I propose.

Although California has led the way in gifted education, we can not rest on our laurels. We can initiate the next quantum leap in the gifted education movement.

The renaissance of gifted education did not begin until after World War II. Before that, the dark ages were lighted by a few pioneers such as Terman, Davis and Hollingworth who helped us discover that giftedness (called genius during the twenties and thirties) was a real phenomenon and worthy of study. Although they hoped to remove some of the shrouds of mystery of 'genius', they were only isolated voices in the dark ages of mass education.

The renaissance began when the nation was awakened to the appreciation of intelligence as a national resource. Perhaps we have Sputnik to thank for that awakening; perhaps it was a more general resurgence of national spirit, but whatever the root causes, resources were made available for us to turn a focus on intelligence-in-the-extreme and how it could be educated.

This notion ushered in the renaissance of the gifted movement--a spirit unleashed, a value affirmed--an opportunity to explore areas in education never before charted. And explore we did! We wrote manifestos (we called them frameworks); we drew and redrew boundaries, sometimes too narrowly and sometimes too expansively; we tried hundreds of different programs with thousands of differing degrees of success (for that matter, we were still attempting to define success); our pendulums swung between the extremes of quantitative and qualitative definitions of giftedness--we were, in short, exploring. And as with any renaissance, we had our excesses which had to be allowed as we grew and just as surely had to be reigned in.

It was a heady period in our history. Fortunately, there were two steadying influences: one in the form of administrative giftedness, and the other in the form of a collective personality of the various professional experts involved. The administrative geniuses in California is epitomized by Paul Plowman, Dave Hermanson, Ruth Martinson, Eleanor Schmadel, Joe Rice, Bob Swain, Marcella Bonsall, Bob Bell, Dick Sholseth, early leaders who, with their colleagues at the county, district and state department levels, had to ride herd on this renaissance movement. It is our legacy that they allowed districts the freedom to inquire into the writings and works of James Gallagher, John Gowan, Bloom & Krathwohl and Guilford. Districts were allowed to explore, but these leaders, knowledgeable in the literature of giftedness, were also there to supervise and reign in at the proper times, demanding enough accountability to satisfy the exchequer but not so much as to stifle the

> *"After the renaissance comes science; and that time has come."*

spirit of this infant movement. The gifted movement in America may never know these names, but all new leaders will forever be indebted to their guidance. For gifted programs in California alone have grown from zero in 1960 to include 220,000 gifted children today. The other steadying influence was (and still is) the collective personality of administrators, coordinators and teachers of the gifted. I know of no other group in education as dedicated, caring and open minded as are educators of gifted. Many of them carried programs on sheer determination when funding lapsed; many of them carried children who did not meet numerical criteria though they were obviously gifted; and many of them paid their own ways to conferences because they knew it would help them improve the quality of their teaching of gifted children. They fended off the barbs of "eliteism" when in truth, it is the traditional curriculum which is elite and they knew this. They were eager to undertake, understand and carry the special responsibilities of their special children.

They helped validate gifted programs no matter what it took because they were who they were. But most of all they were the change agents of education--people who were neither afraid of change nor of the discomfort it brings. Every state has since, unknowingly, profited from their findings.

These are the people who brought us through this renaissance period to where we are now; and, while no period in any history is easily demarked at the time, I believe we are now passing from one period to another, and that this is a fitting time of celebration to mark that transition.

My vision into gifted education of the future is partially shaped by their work. But it is equally shaped by my work as a specialist, a psychologist whose career has been concerned with individual differences and with the application of a theory of intelligence to educational practices.

Thus I think the time has come to leave this exploratory period--not to leave exploration, but to leave the period given over to exploration--in favor of making a consolidation of what we have learned...to make a science of gifted education. After

the renaissance comes science; and that time has come.

I issue the challenge to you to become scientific, knowing that it is a challenge which may not be popular because the word science has all the connotations of regimented, antiseptic determinism--almost the antithesis of the renaissance spirit. That, of course, is sometimes the sterile side of science. But the other side of science is as exploratory in its own way as was the exploration of renaissance. It is after all, science that is leading us today on the greatest physical explorations of all--the technical exploration of biochemistry and space. We do not know now exactly how we will explore space and the human condition, but however it is done, it will be guided by science. And scientists who lead these explorations are gifted adults who, more than ever before, must possess to an even higher degree than happenstance qualities of divergent thinking abilities, evaluation thinking abilities which are well developed all the way from relational thinking through implications thinking. It is in this spirit that I offer the challenge to bring science to the gifted movement; not to determine where we are going or how we are going to get there, but to introduce a new degree of order in the explorations that we make.

Why? Because we do have documented results and results lead to general rules. The rules for guiding a program scientifically are simple: 1) have a well delineated program, 2) with generalizable implementation procedures, 3) with measureable objectives which are to be measured and tracked, 4) with means of reporting documented results and enforced recognition of this reporting by all people engaged in the public education of our gifted, 5) with the earliest identification of differentiated intellectual abilities followed up with uniquely matched curriculum to further develop the intellectual giftedness.

Each of these five prerequisites has been well established and practiced. They offer us a platform from which to begin. These guidelines are simple but not easy. But unless we are objective, unless we sacrifice provincial egos, we cannot progress beyond our current stage of growth--we will be left to continue re-inventing the wheel and reorganizing the holes for the spokes. We are at the end of our adolescence in gifted education in California-- I add "in California", because as I travel the States and other countries, I see educators just entering their adolescent growing period and I think that it is too bad that they do not benefit from our experiences here. Yet I realize that because the responsibility for education lies in the local board of education, public education dictates that each district, even each state, has its own adolescent period to live through. Anyway, we in California are at the end of our adolescent growth and now it is time for maturity...planning our futures. Part of that future is a realistic re-appraisal of the impact of gifted programs on students who have participated. They should be re-tested on the same instrument used for placement in order to assess whether the gifted program did in fact keep them gifted and improve their giftedness. They need to tell us what they have accomplished. Are they happy? What would they contribute in information to us?

At a minimum the country needs several well-constructed examples of objectified programs with the attendant operations, measures and plans for evaluation. We need a clearing house for reporting outcomes--not for making invidious comparisons--but for sharing results. The science of computer technology makes this easy to accomplish. We must channel the spirit of the renaissance into the discipline of science.

It is important for us to meet this challenge. Because gifted education has led the way for general education for many years. It is important that we maintain that leadership and through it that we guide general education into a new era of its own. As we enter the next century, we need the gift of accumulated wisdom to plan an education of preparedness. And without apology, I say it is imperative that we begin the process for each and every child who enters school by assessing their individual abilities...that every teacher be trained in basic understanding of the nature of differentiated intellectual abililties so that every child's basic profile of intellectual abilities is addressed through curriculum experiences.

1) a well delineated program...
2) generalizable implementation procedures...
3) measureable objectives...
4) reporting documented results'...
5) earliest identification...

Teachers need to look upon the gifted as quarterbacks of the future; we must consider ourselves as their guards and tackles, because no matter what game in life they are to play, they will enter the game with some characteristics peculiarly theirs and they need armor for their own protection.

We have often given lip service to placing them in a protected environment, but we have not. There is knowledge today about their characteristics such that we could design a school to nurture them, to provide them with programs which instill the desire to work, to enhance their giftedness and which will give them courage to keep going by assuring them they have the abilities to succeed.

My contribution to the field of gifted education has been the understanding of differential intelligences. The piano offers us a ready analogy for understanding intelligence. Intelligence is a mental song. The piano has 88 keys; the Structure of Intellect (Guilford, 1966) has isolated over 90 kinds of intellectual products of the human brain. Every gifted child's mental 'song' has its own melody. Like the piano which has discrete sounds for each note, the SOI factors are also discrete. Both the piano notes and the intellectual abilities can be combined in many ways on many levels (sounds). Some abilities match well with what successful school learning depends upon; others, in children just as bright, do not match so well. But those who come to school gifted in Memory will surely be noticed by the teacher and usually will get tested for inclusion in a gifted program.

We know there is a song called "Reading". It is made up of eleven notes (abilities). The song cannot be complete if one or more 'notes' is missing. There is also a song called arithmetic; it is made up of nine 'notes' (abilities). There is a song called math; it requires all the notes in arithmetic and some of the notes in reading. We know that gifted girls do so poorly on two spatial abilites CFS and CFT that not only do they steer clear of math and science in high school, their self images are damaged to the extent that they stay out of science, engineering and architecture. We know that boys are much better at auditory learning than are girls who are more visual. Thus boys do better in arithmetic naturally and girls do better in early reading. First and foremost, every child needs a profile of his or her learning strengths and weaknesses. This information is part of the platform from which to build a curriculum to address their needs.

Secondly, they all need, in return, a gift from us--love and enlightenment. We are their mentors as well as their guards and tackles. Mentors do not lead the way. Instead they open the door to unknown places, to send their proteges into dark rooms. A mentor turns on a light, hands it to them, pushes them in, and steps back, closing the door. Why? Because a mentor knows that *the eyes only see when there is light, but the soul sees when there is darkness*. And mentors know that their job is to give illumination. With illumination--with illuminated minds, all else follows.

The science of giftedness awaits.□